

Grandview Woodland Area Council
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Jerry W. Dobrovolny
Assistant City Engineer, Transportation
Crossroads—7th Floor
City of Vancouver
453 West 12th Avenue
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Thursday June 10, 2010

Dear Mr Dobrovolny:

Re: Cycling in Vancouver: Looking Forward to 2010/2011

The staff report “Cycling in Vancouver: Looking Forward to 2010/2011” (<http://vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20100506/documents/csbu5.pdf>) was approved by council on Thursday, May 6, 2010. The report outlines investments to increase cycle mode share through planning and evaluation, cycling network improvements, and complementary projects and programs.

Included in the approved report is a recommendation “THAT staff report back on options to conduct a trial of a fully separated bike lane or lanes on an arterial street outside of the Downtown core, in addition to the trial previously approved by Council for a fully separated bike lane on part of the city’s existing local street bikeway.”

Grandview Woodland Area Council (GWAC) would like to express support for the idea of the separated bike lane trial, and would like to highlight the opportunity for improved cycling facilities in the Grandview Woodland area.

Rationale for Selection of the Grandview Woodland Area for a Separated Bike Lane Trial

The city’s recent announcement of \$25 million in new cycling infrastructure funding will promote cycling by providing safer routes for cyclists in Vancouver. Nearly all of the planned investment for the next two years will create and improve routes in the city’s westside and downtown, with no new routes currently planned east of Main Street. While this money will go toward filling gaps that exist in these parts of Vancouver, there are also many gaps in the cycling network in other areas of the city.

As such, the Grandview Woodland Area Council would like to emphasize the importance of providing new cycling infrastructure funding in a balanced fashion. The separated bike route trial on an arterial route outside of downtown is an opportunity to balance cycling investment across the city’s neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhoods on the eastside are already popular with cyclists. In fact, Grandview Woodland already boasts one of the highest rates of cycling in a city neighbourhood at over 11% — three times the average rate in Vancouver. This high rate of cycling will be an asset in a separated lane trial, as success of the trial will depend on the community support of cyclists using the new facility.

While there are two popular east-west connector routes through the neighbourhood (Central Valley Greenway and Adanac), the existing north-south cycling connections — Woodland and Lakewood — are inadequate. Due to the topography of the area, both Woodland and Lakewood do not serve the needs of many cyclists because they involve a significant elevation change to access the neighbourhood’s major destinations on Commercial Drive.

A separated lane trial on a north-south arterial in the Grandview Woodland area would be a substantial improvement for cyclists and potential cyclists in the neighbourhood.

If the trial extended from Hastings to 10th Avenue, it would provide a safe connection between four popular east-west routes — the Adanac bike route, the Central Valley Greenway, the BC Parkway, and the 10th Avenue route — as well as safer cyclist access to the Broadway/Commercial transit hub and the Hastings transit corridor. It would also bring improved access for cyclists to popular destinations along Commercial Drive such as shops, restaurants, and Britannia Centre. If the separated lanes were extended further south along Victoria Drive, additional connections to Ridgeway and Kent Avenue routes and improved cyclist access to commercial destinations in South Vancouver would also be realized.

There are two options for a north-south separated lane trial in the Grandview Woodland area that should be considered: Commercial Drive or Victoria Drive.

Option 1: Commercial Drive *(with traffic calming measures on Victoria Drive)*

Rationale for a Separated Lane Trial on Commercial Drive

Commercial Drive is a desirable route for cyclists as both a destination street and as a connector. A separated bike lane trial on Commercial Drive would provide a safe route for cyclists to access shops, restaurants, and entertainment along the street. As existing north-south routes (Woodland and Lakewood) are at significantly different elevations and provide more challenging grades than Commercial Drive, the street is already a popular route for confident cyclists.

But despite the popularity of Commercial Drive for cycling, it currently lacks any type of cyclist facility. While other arterial routes, such as Main Street, have received painted bike lanes or shared-use markings in recent years, Commercial Drive has not yet been given any designation for cyclists. The requirement to share space with traffic on busy Commercial Drive is likely a major deterrent to less confident cyclists and potential cyclists.

The recent investment in bike racks on Commercial Drive is welcome recognition of the street as a popular destination and connecting route for cyclists. Selecting Commercial Drive to conduct a separated bike lane trial would leverage this investment and provide world-class cycling facilities on a destination street with a demonstrated demand for cycling facilities.

Considerations

GWAC is aware that it may be necessary to re-allocate some road-space from vehicle travel lanes or parking amenities to successfully implement a separated bike lane trial on any arterial street. While the re-allocation of road space is an unfortunate necessity, we believe that a separated cycling facility is a more efficient use of space that will improve the resilience of the neighbourhood and provide safe access to a greater diversity of road users.

As the experience of European cities demonstrates, reallocating road space and providing safe alternatives to car use is likely to produce a net decrease in private automobile traffic. However, such a change may produce congestion temporarily as drivers adjust, and this could lead to an unwelcome traffic increase on residential streets and neighborhood collectors (such as Victoria Drive). To mitigate this potential impact, other traffic calming measures should be implemented simultaneously, and driver communication should be used to encourage the use of alternative arterial routes (such as Nanaimo and Clark).

There may also be some concern that a reduction in automobile space would have negative impacts on local business on a commercial street. As such, the provision of automobile parking spaces for business access should be a priority in designing a separated bike lane on Commercial Drive.

Finally, implementing a separated bike lane on any destination arterial route may raise potential for conflict with truck deliveries and transit users. These concerns would also need to be addressed in the route design.

While we recognize that further study and analysis by city staff may be required to confirm the viability of a separated bike lane on Commercial Drive, we note that similar challenges will need to be overcome with a separated lane trial on any “destination” arterial with a shopping area and a bus route.

Option 2: Victoria Drive *(with painted markings on Commercial Drive)*

Rationale for a Separated Lane Trial on Victoria Drive

A separated lane trial on Victoria Drive would also do much to encourage cyclists in the Grandview Woodland area. As a relatively flat street with connections to the Central Valley Greenway, Adanac, and 10th Avenue routes, it is already a popular connecting route for cyclists. While Victoria Drive itself is not a destination for many cyclists, it is more accessible to Commercial Drive destinations than the existing north-south routes.

As a street with just two lanes of vehicle traffic, a separated bike route on Victoria Drive may be very attractive to cautious cyclists who would otherwise be intimidated by a busier commercial street with wider unprotected intersection crossings. And as a separated lane trial on this route would not require design solutions to bus route or commercial parking requirements, its implementation would likely be more straightforward.

Victoria Drive has also recently been downgraded to a “neighborhood collector” route, and efforts that may reduce the available space for thru traffic on the residential street could contribute to a desirable reduction in the speed and volume of car traffic.

Considerations

If Victoria Drive were selected for a separated lane trial, we would emphasize the importance of providing a route designation on Commercial Drive as a supplementary measure in conjunction with the lane trial. For example, provision of painted bike lanes or shared use markings on Commercial Drive would improve the cyclist presence and encourage road sharing on this destination route.

Conclusion

GWAC is pleased that the city is committed to creating safer routes for cyclists, and we hope that the opportunity to implement a separated bike lane trial on a north-south route in the Grandview Woodland area will be given serious consideration.

The popularity of the neighborhood as a destination for cyclists as well as the high number of commuter cyclists in the area make Grandview Woodland a promising location for a separated bike lane trial.

We would be happy to discuss the above recommendations in more detail with interested members of city staff or Council.

Sincerely,

Graham Anderson

on behalf of the Directors of GWAC

Cc: Scott Edwards, Manager of Greenways and Neighbourhood Transportation
Bicycle Advisory Committee
Mayor and Council

This letter is available online at

www.vcn.bc.ca/gwac/articles%20and%20media/10-06-10GWAC_SeparatedBikeLanes.pdf